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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIGALI 000018

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TAGS: [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [RW](#)
SUBJECT: NATIONAL DIALOGUE: ORDINARY CITIZENS PUSH THEIR
AGENDAS THROUGH CALL-INS

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Classified By: Ambassador W. Stuart Symington for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During Rwanda's December 10-11 National Dialogue, broadcast via television, radio and streaming internet video to a national and international Rwandan audience, President Kagame criticized sharply several ministers and other officials over mismanaged or ineffective programs in areas such as agriculture, justice and the media. Echoing familiar themes, Kagame urged Rwandans to be self-reliant, stressed the importance of honest and competent leadership and, addressing critics of Rwanda, and asserted that the entire two-day event (including ostensibly unscreened public call-in questions and SMS texts) was an example of "political space" and democracy in action. END SUMMARY.

"WHAT DOES THE PRESIDENT THINK ABOUT GAY MARRIAGE?"

¶2. (SBU) On December 10 and 11, the Government of Rwanda (GOR) conducted its seventh annual "National Dialogue" conference in Kigali. This constitutionally-mandated event brought together Rwanda's senior leaders, including President Kagame, cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, provincial governors and district mayors, among others, to discuss "issues relating to the state of the Nation, the state of local governments and national unity." The event was broadcast live on the internet as well as on national television and radio. Rwandans at home and abroad submitted questions and comments by telephone, e-mail and SMS. Topics ranged from the curious--What does a certain minister do in the President's office?--to the provocative--What does the President think about gay marriage? (Kagame was not in attendance at the time, but in response, officials discussed briefly a small-scale health survey on homosexuals recently conducted in Rwanda)--to the sensitive--a high school girl said she had been thrown out of class because she was a Tutsi; officials took her information privately to address the issue. SMS texts from the public were projected on a large screen and read out loud. Emboffs attended both days of the event, which took place in Kinyarwanda, with simultaneous translation into French and English.

¶3. (SBU) In his opening remarks, Kagame said Rwanda had made much progress on economic, social, and governance issues, but needed to "deepen democracy." The World Bank voted Rwanda the world's star "reformer" this year for introducing business-friendly reforms, but now Rwanda needed to fully implement such reforms. On governance, Kagame asked "What is our role, as leaders, in our objective of developing Rwandans?" Good leaders are the key, he said, stressing that where there are bad or self-interested leaders, not much is

achieved.

"ONE COW PER LEADER"...NOT

14. (SBU) On the first of the two days, Kagame grilled ministers and other national- and local-level officials over several programs or initiatives the GOR had not implemented well. For example, following sharp questioning about the "One Cow Per Poor Family" program, which had in many cases benefited local leaders rather than the poor, Kagame said, "Ministers, get those cows back" and reallocate them properly. "I'll give you a few days." (Note: This issue, which broke as the "One Cow Per Leader" scandal, remains prominent in the media up to today as the Ministry of Agriculture works to reallocate thousands of cows to the most needy. End Note.) Kagame expressed frustration that efforts to combat soil erosion, a longstanding national priority, had slipped in importance, and he castigated officials for failing to adequately explain to farmers how to access a little-used agriculture fund designed to help them. When one caller complained about weak radio and television reception in Gisenyi (Rubavu) and former minister of information Louise Mushikiwabo gave a lengthy explanation of the problem, he responded that this was an old problem and she should instead have described efforts and a timeline for solving it. (Note: Mushikiwabo was named foreign minister on December 2; no new minister of information position has been named. End Note.)

15. (SBU) The second day included sessions on the Rwandan diaspora community, national unity and reconciliation, the status of gacaca trials, and economic issues. According to an MFA official, Rwanda earned more from remittances from the diaspora (an estimated \$175m in 2009) than it did from coffee and tea exports. Obstacles to diaspora involvement in

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building Rwanda were organizational (the community abroad was divided) or informational (a "negative diaspora" abroad continued to promote "genocide ideology" or "divisionism"). The GOR intended to address these obstacles by stepping up its efforts to disseminate information, educate Rwandans about country's history and culture, and establish structures to help unify the diaspora. During the discussion on national unity, which touched on GOR civic education and cohesion-building initiatives, the presenter noted that according to surveys, only 44-49 percent of Rwandans trusted each other, in comparison to other countries such as the United States, where the figure was 50-55 percent. On gacaca, local courts were on track to complete all trials by the end of January 2010, and the GOR planned to release a final report on gacaca in March 2010; once gacaca was over, any new genocide-related cases would go to the traditional court system.

PRESIDENT: "CAN YOU HAVE MORE POLITICAL SPACE THAN THIS?"

16. (SBU) Kagame, in his December 11 closing remarks, decried the GOR's failure to help poverty-stricken genocide survivors more effectively and the lackluster implementation of a work-release program in which convicted genocidaires can go home if they agree to participate in public works schemes. (Note: GOR officials explained during the dialogue that two-thirds of the 90,000 prisoners released under this program were sitting idly at home. End Note.) Kagame also chided government officials for simply dictating orders to the populace, instead of relying more on persuasion and education. "Forced clapping is meaningless," he said, adding that leaders needed to teach people what is good.

17. (SBU) He expressed pride that Rwanda had adapted traditional practices to address modern-day problems, such as the "gacaca" system of community-based genocide trials; "imihigo," whereby officials set and are graded on performance targets; and the "itorero" civic education program, which aims to promote national unity by teaching

Rwandan values, culture and history. Outsiders, Kagame said, had a right to criticize Rwanda but were often ignorant of local realities. "People say Rwanda lacks democracy and political space. Yet over the past two days, individual Rwandans have called in to express their views. This does not exist anywhere else--other countries screen incoming calls, because their senators and presidents won't let people call in and insult them." He concluded that thought by asking rhetorically, "Can you have more political space than this?"

18. (C) COMMENT: When Kagame was present he dominated the proceedings, making the National Dialogue more akin to a board meeting led by a strong CEO than a New England-style town hall meeting. As he has done regularly in public events in the past, he grilled government officials on their efforts to provide better service to the public and he encouraged the public to hold government officials accountable. Indeed, the event was striking for its inclusion and discussion of topics raised by the public through call-ins and SMSes, often holding ministers and elected leaders uncomfortably accountable. The two-day event, which coincided with a Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) party congress and a major gathering of the diaspora community, reflected the GOR's and Qgathering of the diaspora community, reflected the GOR's and the RPF's stated aim of including all Rwandans and overcoming the country's past divisions. It was a high-profile effort intended to better connect the state with and make it more responsive to the average citizen, a theme senior Rwandan officials often emphasize. Finally, with Rwanda due to hold presidential elections in 2010, the event was also a prime opportunity for the RPF and Kagame to remind all Rwandans of his prestige, authority, and continuing efforts to bring prosperity and development to the country. END COMMENT.
SYMINGTON